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1897

GOTHIC ALPHABETS

THE TEXT BY JARO SPRINGER

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GOTHIC ALPHABETS

THE artistic adornment of capital letters was a product of the Middle Ages. The nearest approach to such decoration in classic epigraphy was the larger size of the initial, and, as far as we know, the ancient scribes gave prominence to particular letters merely by increasing their size, or varying their colour. In the earliest illuminated manuscripts now extant, the illustrations accompany the text in the form of pictures. The ancient traditions of book-ornament governed their production, as we see in the *Virgil* of the Vatican Library, the *Homer* of the Ambrosiana at Milan, and the *Genesis* at Vienna, manuscripts dating from the fourth to the sixth centuries. The ornamentation never extended to the text.

The materials for a history of decorative initials during the first centuries of the Middle Ages, when the art was in its infancy, are scanty and incomplete, and have never been properly sifted. The special purpose of this essay is a further reason for brevity in this connection. I shall therefore only touch upon a few points bearing on the development of text-decoration, and my statements must be accepted as suggestions rather than as authoritative pronouncements.

The Germanic races learnt the language in which the consoling promises of the Christian faith were vouchsafed them, from the Romans. Seeking a clearer and more definite expression in which to set forth the new code than their own inflexible speech afforded, they naturally borrowed from that in which its doctrines had been conveyed to them. The Northern tribes

also took the art of writing from the Romans. The Teuton learnt this difficult art, and, applying the ancient decorative forms of his tribe to the adornment of its characters, added to it something all his own. The pictorial illuminations he found in Roman and early Christian manuscripts were to the Gothic or Lombard scribe mysterious productions, which he had neither desire nor power to imitate. He was therefore never tempted into the use of pictorial illustration. But he gradually borrowed the familiar decorations of his household chattels for the adornment of the letters he wanted to distinguish, taking care in this new use of the traditional decorative motives of his tribe, to select those best fitted for the calligraphic application of ornament. Decorated letters were no doubt first used in books which set forth the fundamental truths of Christianity. But their ornamentation had no didactic purpose; it merely satisfied an æsthetic need.

The text-decorators of the early Middle Ages made use of a rich variety of elements, taking motives from geometrical figures, plants, animals, &c. We cannot discuss the rise and progress of the art; the necessary material is as yet unpublished⁽¹⁾. My present object is to deal with the special group of ornamented initials, the actual lines of which are adaptations of living creatures, as distinguished from those to which the ornament is accessory — in other words, with zoomorphic

(1) Karl Lamprecht, in his *Initial-Ornamentik des VIII. bis XIII. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig 1882), made an excellent beginning, which unfortunately, has not been followed up.

and anthropomorphic letters. Letters composed of animal forms probably make their first appearance in certain manuscripts, which the earlier palæographers suppose to be Longobard productions of great antiquity(1). The bird and the fish are very favourite motives, perhaps because their symbolic use in early Christian art was still present to the mind of the scribe. In manuscripts classified as Visigothic, zoomorphic initials are common down to a late period of the Middle Ages(2). The Visigoths carried their predilection for these particular letters into Spain, and they are very freely introduced in Spanish manuscripts(3). I have noted the following examples of animal and figure initials in the manuscripts of other tribes and of later periods.

1. Eighth century. Anglo-Saxon. *Homilies of St. Augustine*, Munich. An *I*, consisting of an armless man, standing. Silvestre, *Pal. Univ.* IV, 24.
2. Eighth century. *Mass book of Gellone*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale. The symbols of the Evangelists as letters. Silvestre III, 102.
3. 794. St. Gall. An *S* formed of two cocks. *Pal. Sac.* 184.
4. Ninth century. *Evangelary of Louis the Pious*. The symbols of the Evangelists as above. Reproduced in Bastard.
5. Ninth century. Lombard. *St. Augustine*, Paris. The tail of a *Q* formed of a little horse. Silvestre III, 69.
6. Eleventh century. Cicero, *De Oratore*. Paris. An *E* formed of a dragon, an *S* of two serpents. Silvestre III, 155.
7. Twelfth century. *Rouleau mortuaire de St. Vital*. An anthropomorphic *T* of demons and dragons. Silvestre III, 234.
8. 1380. *Charte de Charles V.*, Silvestre III, 75.
9. About 1400. Neuwirth, *Braunschweigisches Skizzenbuch eines mittelalterlichen Malers*. Prague 1897.

(1) Westwood, for instance, in his *Palæographia Sacra*, plate 28.

(2) Westwood, *Palæographia Sacra*, plate 30.

(3) Cahier, *Bibliothèques*, passim. — Fleury, Laon, nos. 33, 281, 423.

A Bohemian work, dating from between 1380-1400. The drawing reproduced on plate 1, a man and woman with a dragon, of which the editor could give no explanation, is, in my opinion, an anthropomorphic *M*.

Letters formed of figures do not seem to have made their appearance in Greco-Byzantine manuscripts before the eighth century(1). The usual decoration at the beginning of the earlier Byzantine manuscripts was an ornamented square, placed transversely across the page as a head-piece. The outline of the ornaments was drawn with narrow gold lines, the spaces thus enclosed being filled in with colour, after the fashion of enamels. For figure-initials the Byzantines made use of small and dainty little figures and animals. Their initials have in general some direct bearing on the text, and illustrate particular passages. We find no trace of their use in Byzantium before the eighth century(2), when they became very frequent, persisting until the fifteenth century. It has of late become the fashion to insist upon the Byzantine origin of all Western art, and more especially that of the mediæval miniaturists. The history of figure-initials, however, gives no support to this theory. Such decorations appeared in

Byzantium later than in the West. It is just the early, characteristically Byzantine initial so frequent in Eastern art that was never imitated in the West.

The examples quoted, which might easily be multiplied, attest the continuous use of figures-letters from their first introduction early in the Middle Ages to the dawn of the fifteenth century. The late Gothic of the North, with its strong tendency to fantastic

(1) Wattenbach, *Das Schriftwesen im Mittelalter*. Leipzig 1875. p. 294.

(2) Bordier, in his *Manuscripts Grecs*, reproduces some initials from Byzantine manuscripts of the eighth century, in the Bibliothèque Nationale: p. 60: fish- and bird-letters, eighth century.—p. 117: *E* a man catching fish, tenth century.—p. 172: *o* two hares, *ov* two hares and two dogs, eleventh century.—p. 265: hare and bird, fifteenth century.

LETTER H
ENGRAVING BY THE MASTER OF THE BANDEROLES

trifling and grotesque imagery, readily adopted the figure-alphabet as a means of expression, adding to it the satiric element so characteristic of late Gothic art. In the fifteenth century, various complete alphabets were published, in the production of which the new arts of engraving on wood and copper were turned to account. These alphabets were not merely designs to be practically applied by card-painters and xylographers. They were also artistic productions of no special purpose, in which the imaginative faculty of the designer found expression.

The earliest known example of a figure-alphabet has been lately acquired for the Berlin Print-Room. It consists of pen-drawings washed with Indian ink, on parchment. There are twenty-three letters, as in all fifteenth century alphabets, the same sign doing duty for the letters *u*, *v*, *w*. The letters are drawn on four strips of parchment, thus:—

1. *A B C D E F* (81,5 × 16 cm).
2. *G H I K L M* (83 × 16,2 cm).
3. *N O P Q R S* (81,5 × 16 cm).

On the reverse of the first strip there is an inscription, barely legible, and unhappily, partly erased:

Dyss abc. vrehrt vnd schanckht
mir Mein hertz liebe Bass
Maria Crydenhaberj (Crydenhuberj?)
a d 27 Maj . . 98
Hans Balthasar . . .

This abc was offered and presented to me by my beloved cousin, Maria Crydenhaberj, May 27 . . 98. Hans Balthasar . . .

The character is that of the sixteenth century. The date must therefore be read 1598.

The motives used in this alphabet are cowered figures and fabulous beasts, dragons. The central spaces of the letters are filled with stiff sprays of bramble. The drawing is coarse and vigorous, the washes of Indian ink are boldly applied. The alphabet was produced about 1400, or at any rate early in the fifteenth century, probably in Germany. It was formerly in the Eugen Felix collection at Leipzig, and was acquired for the Berlin Museum in the summer of 1897 (1). See plates I-XII.

(1) A. v. Eye and P. E. Börner. *The Eugen Felix Collection at Leipzig*, p. 153 of the text. *Grotesque Alphabet of the first half of the fifteenth century*. The editors read the date of the inscription

Another example of Gothic figure and animal alphabets is engraved on wood. Two copies are in public collections, one in the Basle Museum on two uncut sheets, another, cut and incomplete, in the British Museum (1).

The facsimiles on plates XIII-XVI are made from the Basle copy, which the director of the Basle Museum kindly lent us for reproduction in the State Printing Press at Berlin. The letters are divided as follows on the two sheets:

<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>F</i>
<i>G</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>M</i>
<i>N</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Q</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>S</i>
<i>T</i>	<i>V</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>Z</i>

INITIAL *D*
FROM A LUCIDIARIUS
STRASSBURG, MARTIN SCHOTT

The impressions from the blocks are sharp, and, in colour, pale brown. Some of the letters are partially tinted in water-colour; the colours are laid on in thin washes with a broad brush, without any special artistic purpose or effect. Yellow, brown, red, and occasionally blue, are used. The cross-line of the *A* is formed of a manuscript-roll, on which, under a number of strokes representing lines of writing, is the date MCCCCLXIII (2).

This woodcut alphabet of 1464 is of Netherlandish origin. At a comparatively early stage of its history, an attempt was made to connect it with the author of the first edition of the *Biblia Pauperum* (3). This attribution was again brought forward more

on the reverse, 1598. A reproduction on a reduced scale is given on plates 33-36. In the sale catalogue of the Felix Collection, Cologne, 1886, the alphabet figures on p. 214 under no. 1108. The reading of the inscription here differs slightly from that in our own text.

A more detailed description of the alphabet is given by Ludwig Kaemmerer in the October number of the *Jahrbuch d. K. Preuß. Kunstsamml.* 1897. The writer shewed me his article before publication, thus confirming some of my statements, and enabling me to make emendations in others.

(1) Willshire, *Catalogue of Early Prints, in the British Museum*, London, 1879, p. 200. See the reduced facsimiles of the letters, *K L Z*, and of the tail-piece, on plate VIII.

(2) In a manuscript, containing a series of initials, in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford (no. 1504), there are very exact contemporary copies of the *A B C D* of the woodcut alphabet. See Shaw, *Illuminated Ornaments*, London, 1833, plate 27, and Kaemmerer, *op. cit.*

(3) Léon de Laborde, *Débuts de l'Imprimerie à Mainz et à Bamberg*. Paris, 1840. p. 19.

recently by Max Lehrs(1). It passed unchallenged, and may now be said to be generally accepted. In any case, the alphabet must have been executed under the direct influence of the Master of the *Biblia Pauperum*. Various peculiarities may be pointed out as evidences of Netherlandish origin, for instance, the brown tone of the printing-ink, and certain forms in the chimeric beasts which seem to indicate familiarity with marine animals, as in the letters *H*, *N*, *S*.

The Alphabet was engraved on copper by the Master of the Banderoles, who reproduced the original with tolerable accuracy (see the reproduction of the letter *H*). He transferred the original date to his copy, and as his real relation to the wood-engravings was long undetermined, early writers christened him the Master of 1464. We are indebted to Max Lehrs(2) for our present more exact knowledge of this engraver (probably a Lower German artist), whose correcter title, the Master of the Banderoles, has now been restored to him. To Max Lehrs we further owe a definite pronouncement on the relation of the copper-plate engravings to the woodcuts. Before the Netherlandish wood-engraver published his letters in 1464, a figure-alphabet had been produced in Germany, which, from the artistic point of view, may be taken as the best production of its class. This was the series engraved on copper by the Master

LETTER *Q*
ENGRAVING BY MASTER E. S.

E. S.(1). The most fanciful invention manifests itself in these figure-letters, in which the draughtsman combines a rich variety of saints and animals with episodic motives, often of a somewhat coarse order. The satiric element predominates throughout. This series dates from about the middle of the fifteenth century(2). Several copies of it have been made, among them one from wood-blocks, now in the Print-Room at

Bologna. The copyist has reproduced the original pretty accurately on the whole, making but few alterations. The imperial eagle of the standard in the *q* is replaced by a striped banner; in the *u*, the little ducks of the original on which the cat turns a longing eye, are left out from the piece of water through which St. Christopher is wading. In certain productions of the Strassburg presses in the fifteenth century, imitations of Master E. S.'s letters figure as initials, as in books published by Knoblochzer and Martin Schott(3). His fanciful designs further gave an occasional impetus to similar creations. In a *Belial*, published by Knoblochzer in 1483, there is an *I* formed of a Samson with the lion, and an

angel(4). A more interesting work, and one historically more important, on account of its earlier date, is the figure-initial *A*, on the tomb of Wilhelm I. of Thannhausen, Abbot of the Premonstrant Abbey of Ursberg (1412-1452). The tomb-stone of Salzburg marble,

(1) Max Lehrs, *Der Meister mit den Bandrollen*. Dresden, 1886. p. 6.

(2) Op. cit. There are accurate pen-drawings of the letters *A*, *B*, *C*, *D* of this alphabet in a manuscript at Oxford. Reproduced by Shaw and by Kaemmerer. The whole series was reproduced in heliogravure in the Chalcographic Society's publication of the year 1890.

(1) Bartsch VI p. 37 nos. 94-109. Passavant, vol. II p. 46. *Das Alphabet des Meisters E. S.* Photographs, Obernetter, Munich.

(2) Kaemmerer, *Fahrbuch d. K. Preufs. Kunstsamml.* XVII, 1896, p. 151.

(3) Schorbach und Spigatis, *Knoblochzer*, p. 37 no. 37, plate 30, and Kristeller, *Straßburger Bücher-Illustration*, p. 80, no. 20.

(4) Schorbach and Spigatis, p. 35, no. 15, plate 27.

now in the National Museum at Salzburg (no. 297) was carved during the Abbot's life-time, as we learn from the inscription, and accordingly dates from before 1452. The Abbot's effigy lies on the stone under a Gothic canopy, supported by two slender pillars, ending in pinnacles. The inscription, which begins with the word Abbas (see reproduction) is on the upper part of the

Another example of the use of figure-letters in the fifteenth century is to be found in a dotted print in the Munich Print-Room (Inv. no. 171484, Schreiber no. 2755). The sacred monogram *y h s* (reversed) is composed of figures and little episodic motives. The Virgin and an angel form the *y*, a crucifix and St. John the *h*. The *y* is made up out of three little scenes, the descent of the

FRAGMENT OF AN INSCRIPTION ON THE TOMB OF THE ABBOT OF URSBERG,
WILHELM I. OF THANNHAUSEN
MUNICH, NATIONAL MUSEUM

stone. It will scarcely be disputed that the initial *A* was produced under the influence of Master E. S. (1). The existence of a dated work, which, though not a copy, is undoubtedly a free adaptation of an *A* by Master E. S. confirms us in the belief that the master's figure-alphabet was executed about 1450.

(1) Cf. the reproductions on the title-page. — Adolf Goldschmidt first drew my attention to the Munich tombstone. I am also indebted to him for the above remarks on the stone and the inscription.

Holy Ghost, the descent into Hell, and the Entombment. The Ascension and the Resurrection appear outside the letters. The fact that the design is reversed seems to indicate that the Munich print is a copy of a lost original.

The architectonic letters of our final series (plates XVII-XXXIX) have nothing in common with the alphabets already discussed (1). They are sedate conceptions,

(1) Passavant II, p. 246, no. 249. (The details inaccurate, and corrected by Lehrs in the *Repertorium* for 1888, p. 236.) Nagler

such as a Gothic craftsman, imbued with the solemnity of cathedral work, may have produced. The letters are formed of the familiar elements of ecclesiastical Gothic, and are made up of buttresses and pointed arches, mouldings and fillets, finials and pinnacles. The construction is firm and correct; some slight violence is done to architectural forms, in adapting them to the letters, but not more than Master E. S. and other designers of fanciful alphabets employed in adapting men and animals to the structure of their letters. The letters *c, f, m, o, p, q* are severely architectural in character; in others, architectonic motives are combined with conventional foliage of the kind peculiar to late Gothic decoration. The familiar bramble-leaf appears in the letters *d, e, g*, but the motive that recurs oftenest is a voluted, fibrous leaf with strongly marked ribs and a rounded tip, as in *a, b, h, k, l, s, t, v*. The two forms are combined in the *n*. In some instances, the leaf has a constructive function, and is used to mark the lines of the letter itself, as in *a, e, g, k*; in others, it is a mere decorative adjunct, and structurally superfluous, as in *b, d, h, l, n, s, t, v*. The small right limb of the *r* is formed of a curving, voluted leaf with a bud on a long wiry stalk, bent downwards. A long stalk passes through the vertical architectonic line of the *x*, terminating above in a fibrous leaf, below in a little bud. In the central division, two lobed and notched caryophyllaceous leaves, with two small grapes, are introduced. The three letters *i, y* and *z* are formed entirely of leaves. The *i* consists of a voluted leaf with strongly marked ribs, terminating in a trefoil. The long right stroke of the *y* is a slender stalk with an indented leaf above, attached on the left to a voluted leaf with rounded and pointed tips. The *z* is made up of two indented leaves, connected, in a very inorganic fashion, by a stem which belongs to neither.

The alphabet is engraved from copper-plates, each letter from a separate plate. The firm, vigorous drawing denotes a hand well practised in the use of the graver, and proclaims itself even more unmistakeably the work of a master skilled in the execution of decorative designs for the use of Gothic handicraftsmen. Cross-hatchings appear here and there — in *b, d, m, n, o, p, q, s*, for instance — and the shadows are emphasised by means of little short strokes. In one case, the field outside the letter is shaded, at the lower end

Künstlerlexikon, IX, p. 30, gives the letters *d, e, i, r* of this alphabet among the works of Master E. S., under nos. 141*a*, 149*a*, 153*a* and 161*a*.

of the letter *l*. The engraver was perfectly well able to differentiate the textures of foliage and architecture by variations in his hatchings. No instance has yet been discovered of the practical application of this alphabet in manuscripts, or of its imitation in the initials of printed books.

The only perfect copy of the whole set of twenty-three letters is the one on eight quarto sheets in the Print-Room at Bologna, where Max Lehrs discovered it, together with other rare treasures of early German art(1). The University Library at Erlangen owns fine copies of thirteen of the letters *c, d, e, f, h, l, m, n, p, q, s, u, x* on sheets with wide margins(2). The Vienna Library has the letters *e, r, y*(3) and the sometime collection of King Frederick Augustus at Dresden the letters *d, f, p*(4). These six letters were originally in Count Sternberg-Manderscheid's collection, sold in 1838(5).

This alphabet is also, I think, a Netherlandish product. The Gothic art of the Netherlands has none of those individual characteristics which carry conviction as to origin at a glance. A monotonous sobriety is the distinguishing feature of Gothic churches in the Netherlands, persisting even throughout that phase of Late Gothic which, in France and Germany, disguised severity of form with agreeable decoration, and modified the rigour of rules by all sorts of playful fantasies. The letters of the architectonic alphabet are marked by the same lifeless monotony. They lack everything that makes up the special character of German Gothic in the fifteenth century: its picturesque effects, its sportive fancy, its rich imaginative quality. These are the very features in which a German designer of architectural letters would not have been found wanting. Indeed, the mere use of severely structural forms for an alphabet seems to me very un-German. Both in French and in German initial ornamentation, architectonic motives are not infrequent(6).

(1) Max Lehrs, *Eine vergessene Kupferstichsammlung*, *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, 1889, p. 14.

(2) Kindly communicated by Professor Zucker. Cf. Lehrs, *Repertorium*, 1888, p. 236, nos. 28-40, where, however, read *e* for *r*.

(3) F. v. Bartsch, nos. 1511-1513. Bartsch erroneously supposed the *y* to belong to another alphabet.

(4) Lehrs, *Repertorium*, passim.

(5) Sale Catalogue of the Collection, p. 8, no. 51 ff.

(6) Even in Italy, we find instances of such an application of ecclesiastical Gothic motives, as in a *P* in a beautiful Milanese Pontifical of 1433-1438, in the Fitzwilliam Museum. M. R. James, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Fitzwilliam Museum*, no. 28, with a reproduction.

But in these, pinnacles and pointed arches are pleasantly and easily adapted, and made serviceable to the calligrapher without any apparent violence. They shew no trace of that melancholy proper to the cathedral-builder, which robs the architectural alphabet of its due effect.

I can offer no other or better evidences of the Netherlandish origin of the alphabet. If draughtsman and engraver were not one and the same person, they were certainly contemporaries and neighbours, Netherlanders working after the middle of the fifteenth century. I should be inclined to look for the engraver in the vicinity of the Master W $\clubsuit$. Max Lehrs has catalogued the works of this artist of the time of Charles the Bold, and has given us a complete survey of his art⁽¹⁾. He engraved a large number of Gothic architectural subjects, dealing with them, indeed, to an extent unparalleled in the work of any of his fellow craftsmen. The Gothic motives of Master W $\clubsuit$'s art were products of the same soil as the architectural alphabet. The constructive imagination of the monogramist is richer and more exuberant than that of the anonymous author of the letters, but they are closely akin in their conception and treatment of Gothic forms. There is, too, a strong affinity in the technique of their respective engravings, though here again, the more talented and more skilful Master W $\clubsuit$ commands a richer medium of expression than the less gifted unknown. Max Lehrs (*Repertorium*, *loc. cit*) pronounces the architectural alphabet an Upper German work. I am quite willing to recognise the weight of any opinion advanced by Max Lehrs; but in this case I am unable to agree with him. I admit that his hypothesis is supported by the evidence of watermarks. On eight of the sheets in the Erlangen copy he found the watermark to be a triple mountain, crowned by a cross. This mark he also discovered, though only once, in a print by Master E. S.⁽²⁾ It occurs, too, in one edition of the xylographic *Ars Moriendi*, published at Ulm about 1480⁽³⁾. But the science of watermarks is a delusive branch of learning, the results of which are not always to be relied on. They may be accepted as confirmatory evidences, but not as grounds for overthrowing a conclusion arrived at by other means.

The architectonic forms of this alphabet are unique. They had no procreative force. The figure-alphabet, on the other hand, was long-lived, and gave rise to numerous imitations. In defiance of æsthetic theory, the adaptation of the human body to the structure of letters has persisted, and proves alluring even to the draughtsman of our own times. I may mention one or two examples of the sixteenth century. The French engraver, Noël Garnier, of whose life we know absolutely nothing, engraved two Gothic alphabets⁽¹⁾. In the larger of the two, the letters are formed of human figures (fools, naked women, drummers, pipers, David and Bathseba), animals, and creeping plants; in the smaller, of tree-stems, creepers, and dragons. Both are extremely rare; even the Bibliothèque Nationale does not boast a perfect copy. In addition to the alphabet, and three chimeric animals, Robert Dumesnil ascribes four plates to Garnier, which are copies from German masters; no. 51, St. Anthony, after Dürer; B. 58; no. 53, the Triumph of Bacchus, after Pencz, B. 92; no. 54, A Combat between three Men, after H. S. Beham, B. 95; no. 55, Apollo dancing with the Muses, after the anonymous print B. X. p. 133, no. 2. The St. Anthony was executed in 1519, the three other prints are undated. The copy of Beham's Combat between three Men by the monogramist R. B. (B. IX, p. 7, no. 5) is dated 1530. We shall probably not be far out, if with Robert Dumesnil, we suppose these copies of Garnier's to have been made about 1540. But the general design of his Gothic alphabets belongs to an earlier period, the close of the fifteenth century. Here again, as in the four instances given above, Garnier probably worked from some foreign original, and we may fairly look upon his large alphabet as a copy of another fifteenth century work of this class, of which all trace has been lost. In 1567, Jost Amman published another figure-alphabet (Andresen, no. 141); the letters, which appear in one large woodcut, are formed of peculiarly slender naked figures, relieved against a flat scroll-pattern, adorned with hanging draperies and bunches of fruit⁽²⁾. These later alphabets are of very little importance in the history of ornamental initials. At the time of their production, letters adapted from

(1) Max Lehrs, *Der Meister W $\clubsuit$. Ein Kupferstecher aus der Zeit Karls des Kühnen*. Dresden 1895.

(2) Max Lehrs, *Die Spielkarten des Meisters E. S.*, p. 12, note 2.

(3) Weigel and Zestermann, II, no. 235, p. 17.

(1) Robert Dumesnil, *Le Peintre-Graveur Français*, VII, p. 1, nos. 1-48.

(2) Strange to say, a figure-alphabet was engraved by a late Italian master, Giuseppe Maria Mitelli (d. 1718). It is, however, an isolated example.

Italian originals had long been in use in France and Germany.

Figure-alphabets never became very popular in Italy. Even before the stamp of the classic Renaissance was laid on letter-decoration, the Italian scribe preferred fixed forms, serving as a framework for rich artistic ornament. In his large ornamental initials, he never, or very rarely, made use of foreign elements in the actual structure of his letters, but composed them of the motives proper to the calligrapher's art. The ground was therefore fully prepared for the reform of text-decoration on Renaissance lines. The learned alphabetical theorist, Fra Luca Pacioli, knew nothing of mediæval letter-designs; the fantastic complexities of Northern Gothic lay outside his experience. In his

chapter, *De lorigine dele lettere de ogni natione* (Viennese edition of 1889, p. 151), he derives the calligraphy which served him as exemplar directly from the hieroglyphs of the Egyptians: "de le quali lettere e cosi de cadaunaltra dico loro inuentione esser stata alibito comme nelli obilischi in Roma . . . doue penni coltelli animali sola de scarpe vcilli boccali per lor lettere a quel tempo e cifre se vsauano. Onde poi piu oltra speculando li homini se sonno fermati in queste che al presente vsiamo . . .". If the Renaissance and the Humanities opened out "a fresh world of thought to man, creating a new heaven and a new earth", they also gave him a new medium for the sumptuous expression of the new thought both in type and manuscript—a new ABC.

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